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**ABSTRACT**

Newspapers and magazines have been used only on a limited basis in the foreign language classroom, because language study has traditionally led to the study of literature. However, this trend is now changing, because (1) foreign language curriculum at the secondary school level is expanding to encompass new goals, and (2) the influence from college and university language programs is decreasing. Newspapers and magazines contain three types of materials useful to language study: (1) technical information, consisting of headlines, column headings, tables of contents; (2) short materials, comprising advertisements, want ads, weather reports, and other short items; and (3) long articles, including full feature stories, fiction, comic strips, editorials, and letters, all of which may be used for intensive, extensive, or supplemental reading purposes. In order to successfully utilize these materials in foreign language study, a list of suggested activities is provided, as well as a sample activity on the use of want ads, presented in English, French, German, and Spanish. Journalistic publications may be used as the basis for a language course, or they may be ancillary to the textbook material, serving to motivate interest in the target language culture. A bibliography is included. (Author/LG)

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# THE USE OF NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

By Charles J. James and Dale L. Lange

Although in many parts of the world newspapers and magazines have been elements of everyday culture for hundreds of years, it is only recently that they have been considered as useful tools for foreign language learning. For example, as Harald Gutschow has indicated, little mention was made of the use of such materials in language learning before 1965 in the teaching of English in Germany.<sup>1</sup> An examination of the bibliography for this Focus Report gives a similar picture for language learning in this country. The reason for the limited use of newspapers and magazines in foreign language classrooms stems from the fact that foreign language learning has traditionally led to the study of literature. Practical goals such as the ability to get information from the popular press have only recently been considered important for classroom instruction.

There are perhaps several reasons for this change: (1) the foreign language curriculum at the secondary school level is expanding to encompass new goals, and (2) the influence from college and university language programs is decreasing. These two factors have resulted in a freer atmosphere and, consequently, in broader choices in curriculum for secondary school students. Some colleges and universities are also opening up their programs to permit a wider range of topics and courses that include more practical aspects, among them the reading of newspapers and magazines.

## WHAT IS IN A NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE?

Prior to a discussion of the pedagogical uses of magazines and newspapers, it is necessary to examine what kinds of materials they contain. Although categories should not be adhered to rigidly, they are valuable for separating and organizing the contents into exercises and various learning activities. The contents of journalistic materials can be divided into three categories: (1) technical material, (2) short material, and (3) long material. These classifications are based on function as well as on length.

Technical material comprises headlines, photograph captions, tables of contents, mastheads, column headings, and datelines. These elements make up the "skeleton" of the newspapers or magazine. They are the guides which help the reader discover where certain kinds of reading material are located, and, in the case of headlines and photograph captions, which items will have the greatest immediate interest. It is possible to gather a substantial amount of information about articles, ads, editorials, and the like from such material.



Short material comprises advertisements, want ads, weather reports, entertainment listings, stockmarket tables, scores from sports events, and "squibs" (short pieces of almanac information put in to fill up blank spaces on the printed page). These components are highly specific in theme, usually of interest to a limited audience, and easily detached in context from the newspaper or magazine. They usually contain a restricted vocabulary and elliptical sentence structures. They are also the "home territory" of families of abbreviations typically used by newspapers and magazines to communicate continually recurring words and phrases, as well as to save space and printing costs.

Long material includes full length feature articles, editorials, letters to the editor, fictional stories, and cartoons and comic strips. Each of the above examples forms an integral news item or a recurring thematic item. Although each may have a unique context, such items usually rely upon the reader's familiarity with other related events and general vocabulary of the target language outside the single newspaper or magazine issue. Thus, unlike short material, long material cannot be readily detached from its context, and unlike technical material, it does not guide the reader's attention within the periodical. Rather, it supplies the reader with the facts, ideas, and opinions currently being expressed.

## USES OF NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE MATERIAL

The use of newspapers and magazines in the foreign language classroom centers mainly, but not exclusively, on the development of the reading skill. Also, classroom use of journalistic materials has often been limited to long material, probably because of its resemblance to literary prose. However, all three categories of journalistic material can be used to stimulate other kinds of language learning activities related to listening, writing, and speaking skills. The use of all four skills contributes greatly to the understanding of the foreign culture and to the development of language proficiency. Some specific activities concentrating on each skill will be suggested later, but first let us examine the use of journalistic materials in developing the reading skill.

### Reading

Such writers as Decanay and Bowen,<sup>2</sup> Grittner,<sup>3</sup> and Lado<sup>4</sup> consider magazines and newspapers as part of a broad reading program in foreign language learning that includes intensive, extensive, and supplementary reading.

Intensive reading is close textual examination and analysis through such activities as vocabulary building (supplying definitions, recognizing cognates, synonyms, antonyms, and derived words) as well as responding to content, meaning, and cultural significance of particular paragraphs or articles. Like any other kind of text, journalistic material can be used for intensive reading activities.

Extensive reading attempts to develop the student's ability to approach reading material with less control; that is, to read more broadly, still concentrating on meaning, content, etc., but with less intensive textual scrutiny and less monitoring by the instructor. In this kind of activity, reading is guided by such learning aids as leading questions, summaries of the content before actual reading, and some minimal vocabulary aids. In order to show his ability to handle this kind of reading, the student may be asked to answer questions on the content or to provide a résumé. Other techniques for testing comprehension are suggested by Valette<sup>5</sup>. Extensive reading can be adjusted to planned classroom activity. It can also serve as an outside task to be accomplished by the student, but evaluated in the classroom. Because of their flexibility and adaptability, newspaper and magazine materials are appropriate for this reading mode not only as a change of pace, but also as an opportunity to provide current information about the foreign culture.

Supplementary reading, which is accomplished mainly outside the classroom, offers the student a wide range of reading materials including newspapers and magazines, and allows him to select topics that are closely related to his interests. Magazines and newspapers are extremely well suited to this sort of activity, and often play an important motivational role. Furthermore, they present current aspects of culture that probably would not be available in a textbook, such as current opinions, up-to-date fashions, sports, and teenage behavior. Because supplementary reading is even less controlled than extensive reading, the student's only task is to read. Evaluation of his understanding of the material may not occur other than through the student's desire to communicate what he has read. However, it may be valuable to ask the student to keep a written record of what he has read, if only to ensure that he is reading outside of regular assignments.

### Vocabulary Building

Much of the vocabulary of textbooks is based on a standard vocabulary list or frequency count of words most often used in that language. Such vocabulary, while useful, may be restrictive in terms of content. Also, it may not be as current as the interests of the student. Newspapers and magazines contain articles, advertisements, and other content which may initially attract the student's attention and then direct him toward his particular interests. As a result, the student's vocabulary may be expanded in his particular areas of interest, allowing him more opportunity to understand and express himself outside of the textbook's basic and restricted vocabulary.

### Understanding Journalistic Style

Since learning to read a newspaper or magazine can be difficult because of its broad cultural nature, one of the many reasons for assigning

such material is to develop an understanding of journalistic style in that particular language. Dupont suggests a means for appreciating journalistic style<sup>6</sup>. His three-step approach includes observation, analysis, and imitation or manipulation. Observation: The student and teacher observe the actual use and functions of the language in current publications to see different journalistic styles and techniques. Analysis: In addition to observing, the student analyzes journalistic style, especially headlines, to see the effects of certain techniques. Imitation: The student then attempts to apply observations and analyses to problems posed to him. He must imitate or manipulate language to achieve the same effect as the models he studied. Such an approach is somewhat advanced, but it may be adapted for intermediate students by means of simple models and simple problems. Advertisements of well-known products (soaps, cars, etc.) could be used as models, and students could be asked to write their own advertisements in the second language.

### Gaining Cultural Insights

The cultural themes indicated by Nelson Brooks,<sup>7</sup> which include ceremony, authority, love, honor, beauty, death, and heroes, among others, can be easily exemplified through newspaper and magazine material. The broad range of events reported in such publications parallel these and other categories and could be used to demonstrate the behavior of the individual within the culture. As we have already noted, such material is current and authentic because it is being reported or printed as it is happening. Material to be used for this purpose may be found on almost any page of a newspaper or magazine in drawings, editorials, comics, articles, advertisements, pictures, and perhaps even in charts and graphs.

In a very recent article,<sup>8</sup> Fresnault-Deruelle indicates that much cultural material exists in comic strips like Astérix and Tintin, which may reveal social organization, insight into the French psychological make-up through humor, and daily behavior through the simplicity of dialogue and pictures. Marsadié and Saint-Péron set up exercises with several chosen comic strips to show how they illustrate language and culture, and how they may be used to develop comprehension of language and culture.<sup>9</sup>

These paragraphs give a general overview of the possibilities for using newspapers and magazines in the foreign language classroom. We will now attempt to show how journalistic material can be arranged for classroom use.

### **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES**

The following is a list of possible, but not exhaustive, activities using a typical foreign language magazine or newspaper that can be assigned to the student. They are arranged according to language skill. A

section is also included on how to deal with the cultural material. Many of the activities below are most effective when undertaken by groups, or "teams" of three or four students.

#### **A. Vocabulary Building**

1. Expand abbreviations and specialized terms from want ads, advertisements, weather reports, etc.
2. List and arrange words according to their frequency in a specific newspaper or magazine column.
3. Build your lexical and grammatical competence by doing cross-word puzzles and other word games. (Simple word games and puzzles based on events discussed in the magazine or newspaper can be created by the teacher.)
4. Make vocabulary lists on a topic of interest to you by means of a scrapbook of newspaper clippings.
5. Construct bulletin board displays from newspaper or magazine advertising using words or phrases from language lessons.

#### **B. Speaking Practice**

1. Read aloud from newspaper or magazine articles, as in a radio broadcast.
2. Do a "commercial" from newspaper or magazine advertising.
3. Give a weather, sports, or special events report, as on television.
4. Act out a dialogue based on a news interview.
5. "Telephone" someone about buying or renting something advertised.
6. Debate a current issue based on data found in a magazine or newspaper article.

#### **C. Reading Comprehension**

1. Use vocabulary lists to aid in reading specific kinds of material (see A-4 above).
2. Match headlines with correct articles, which have been separated and mixed up.
3. Summarize what can be found on the front page of a newspaper.
4. Identify the kinds of language style in different formats.
5. Distinguish objective reporting from editorializing.

#### **D. Writing Exercises**

1. Compose a want ad or other advertisement.
2. Make up a weather report, a sports article, or other special column.
3. Write a short article about current events or school activities.
4. Compose a "Dear Abby" type letter with an appropriate reply.
5. Write a letter to the editor about an editorial or article that you disagree with.



## **E. Cultural Exercises**

1. Show how a foreign newspaper is both similar to and different from American newspapers: headlines, advertisements, want ads cartoons, pictures and picture captions, general content, and the reporting of sports, business, and politics. For example, look at the "sports" reporting of the foreign newspaper. What terms do you find related to sports? What about football? Are there differences? Baseball? Does it exist? How are competitive sports reviewed? Impartially?
2. Take advertisements for a product, such as cars or soap, from both American and foreign magazines. Compare them on techniques used to sell the product, language, visual arrangement, etc.
3. What kinds of language in foreign magazine advertising are used to express terms that in English may be unpleasant to our ears? (What are the equivalents of words like sweat, body odor, pimples, underwear, false teeth?) Are there differences between the euphemisms used in English and those in the foreign language? Why or why not?

### **A SAMPLE ACTIVITY: WANT ADS**

Many different activities can be set up in the classroom involving newspapers or magazines. What follows is one suggestion on the use of a single section of a newspaper or magazine, namely, the classified advertisements, better known as the "want ads." The ideas here could be easily expanded to encompass several related activities listed above, such as vocabulary expansion using crossword puzzles, using full-color advertisements for bulletin boards or speaking practice ("commercials"), or writing exercises for a limited vocabulary such as want ads themselves.

Newspapers and magazines thrive on abbreviations and ellipses. If every advertisement, want ad, stock-market entry, and movie listing were written out in complete words and sentences, a newspaper or magazine would be physically unwieldy, boringly repetitive (at least visually), and exorbitantly expensive. It is, therefore, no surprise that a major problem in reading want ads, and similar short material, is the deciphering and comprehension of abbreviated words and elliptical structures.

Want ads are generally separated into their own section of the periodical. They are arranged according to subject classifications for the things or services sought, bought, or sold. Some newspapers and magazines arrange such classifications in alphabetical order (Apartments, Autos, Houses, Miscellaneous, etc.). Others give each classification a code number and arrange the want ads in numerical order. Before looking for a particular want ad, the teacher and student should peruse the entire section to determine its organization, if a table of contents is not provided.

In a language class it may be best to begin by distributing either original copies of one or more want ad pages, or by asking students to bring a particular issue to class (a stack of old newspapers and magazines in the foreign language is helpful here). Otherwise, various forms of duplication are available, the simplest being for the teacher to type a dozen or so want ads of interest and ditto them.

A single ad is isolated. Initially the teacher "expands" it for the class, first by merely substituting full words for abbreviations, then by filling out complete sentences and ideas. After expanding two or three want ads from the column, the teacher selects one and asks the students to read it silently. Then one student expands it orally by first substituting full words for abbreviations, and then putting these words into sentences. The ultimate objective here would be for a student to tell in his own words what a given want ad says without the intermediate step of deliberately deciphering each abbreviation and ellipsis.

Following are four examples of how the above process might work, going from the printed abbreviations (1) to expanded words and phrases (2), then to complete sentences explaining what each want ad is about (3).

### English

1. "2F to sh 2 br. w.2. Immed. \$41.25 ea. Nr. U."
2. Two females to share two bedroom (apartment) with two. Immediately. \$41.25 each. Near University.
3. Two females are wanted to share a two-bedroom apartment with two other females. They can move in immediately for a rent of \$41.25 per month for each girl. The apartment building is near the University.

### French

1. "3 p.cft. 2<sup>e</sup> et. M<sup>o</sup> Pasteur Tél. 15 à 18 h. 734-90-35."
2. Trois pièces confortables, deuxième étage, Métro Pasteur Téléphoner de 15 à 18 heures, numéro 734-90-35.
3. Il y a un appartement de trois pièces confortables à louer, au deuxième étage. C'est près du Métro Pasteur. On peut téléphoner de 15 à 18 heures, au numéro 734-90-35.

### German

1. "Möbl. Zl. i. n. Whg. n.ä. Ostbhf. ruh. Lage. DM 75,—. an St. 83-11-94 abs."
2. Möbliertes Zimmer in einer neueren Wohnung, nahe Ostbahnhof. Ruhige Lage. DM 75,—. An Studenten (Studierende) 83-11-94 abends.

3. Wir haben ein möbliertes Zimmer in einer neueren Wohnung zu vermieten. Das Wohnhaus befindet sich in der Nähe vom Ostbahnhof, in einer ruhigen Lage. Die Miete beträgt DM 75,— im Monat. Wir vermieten an Studenten (Studierende). Rufen Sie die Nummer 83-11-94 nur abends an!

### Spanish

1. "Sin entrada ni muebles, piso quinto con ascens. en Avda. Asturias cca Mercado, tiene 5 dorm., com., coc., baño, gas ciudad, fza., aqua. 222-14-43 sólo interesa."
2. Sin entrada ni muebles, piso quinto con ascensor, en Avenida Asturias, cerca Mercado, tiene 5 dormitorios, comedor, cocina, baño, gas ciudad, fuerza, aqua. Teléfono 222-14-43 sólo interesados.
3. Se alquila un piso sin entrada independiente ni muebles. Situado en el piso quinto con ascensor, en la Avenida Asturias, cerca del Mercado. El piso tiene cinco dormitorios, un comedor, una cocina, un baño, gas ciudad, fuerza (220 voltios), y aqua. Llama por teléfono número 222-14-43. Se alquila sólo a los interesados.

During these activities, students can make a list of commonly used abbreviations from the newspaper or magazine for future reference. The list should be written by topic, since many abbreviations are used exclusively in one kind of want ad column. Also the vocabulary for many ads may require extensive explanation in terms of cultural awareness of what the vocabulary items imply to the reader of the target language. For example, looking for an apartment requires understanding of how apartments in various countries are designed, as well as how people in the target culture live in them. In addition, certain terms involving apartments may appear as literal translations of terms in the native language, but may not represent the same concept to people in the target culture. Words such as "efficiency," "möbliertes Zimmer," "entresuelo," and "chauffage central" are not quite as simple to understand as their dictionary definitions might seem, owing to the interpretations people put on them. (See Table 1 for a sample of abbreviated terms used for various aspects of apartment living. Similar lists could be made for buying and selling automobiles, for hiring people for specialized occupations, or for buying or selling land.)

After sufficient controlled expansion of selected want ads has been practiced, the students can be assigned to read through any page of want ads, check those that attract attention, and be ready to report on these in class, either in a small group with other students or individually with the teacher. Before a student begins such a report, he or she can ask for explanation of any words or forms that are new or in unusual configuration. Such explanation should be made for the entire class or small group as appropriate, and in the foreign language, using vocabulary already familiar

to the students. Then the student tells what he or she has found in the want ad, explaining what the object or service is for sale or rent, what specific characteristics it has, such as size, color, or location, what price is requested or what salary is offered, and how the reader can obtain more information about the object or service, through an address, phone number, and the like.

An even better exercise is for students to compose their own want ads, using the vocabulary they already know. They can begin by writing out complete sentences describing what they have to sell or wish to purchase. Then they condense these into economical chunks, to be reduced further into abbreviations and ellipses. A limit of two or three lines or fifteen abbreviations to one want ad challenges students to be accurate and concise, as they would have to be if they were actually placing an ad. From this exercise, the entire class can make up its own newspaper or magazine want ad section, as if they were setting up a complete newspaper or magazine.

Tests for comprehension of want ads may take one of two forms. Either a vocabulary test of isolated terms may be given, to be explained in the target language, or a sample want ad can be presented for students to expand into full sentences or phrases, which could be followed by a series of factual questions about the content of the want ad. In a vocabulary test an item should be given under the rubric where it typically appears in the newspaper, since certain words and abbreviations belong with one kind of want ad and not with another. An item like "1 br." will rarely if ever be found in a want ad about a Fiat! Nor would "290 PS" appear in a German obituary notice. Putting these and related terms under rubrics like "Apartments for Rent" or "Autoverkauf" in a vocabulary test eliminates unnecessary guessing on the part of the student. He would never be expected to decipher an abbreviation in his own language without knowing which want ad column it came from. It would be unrealistic to expect it in the target language.

## CONCLUSION

The exercises with journalistic materials, such as those with want ads, do not have to take up a great amount of time. They can be spread out over a semester or quarter as a continuing kind of exercise, parallel to other language learning activities in the class. If a genuine interest develops from working with newspapers and magazines, a complete project such as producing a class newspaper or magazine in the foreign language can be developed.



In fact, reading newspapers and magazines can form the basis for a complete quarter, semester, minicourse, or individualized reading course. Because of the current nature of the language employed and the brevity of most articles and stories, these materials can help build up language skills to a level equal to that attainable with other, more traditional, classroom materials. If used carefully, they can increase motivation to learn more about the target language culture, without the artificiality of most commercially prepared cultural materials.

Newspapers and magazines are an integral part of the daily life of most cultures. Whether designed for a specific audience, such as a high school class, or for the general public, they can be sources of many interesting and useful forms of information about the culture that produces them. In the bibliography which follows there are many articles which discuss activities and procedures different from the ones briefly mentioned here. With them the language teacher can make his or her class more dynamic and relevant to students by giving them material that is fresh, contemporary, and useful to the development of their foreign language skills.

TABLE 1

These are literal translations of common abbreviations used in want ads. Cultural differences in the various languages should be explained by individual teachers.

<u>English</u>	<u>German</u> <sup>10</sup>	<u>French</u> <sup>11</sup>	<u>Spanish</u> <sup>12</sup>
apartment	Whg.	appt.	apto.
central heating	ZH	chf.cl.; chff.ctl.	calef. cent.
bath	Bad; m.B.	s.bs.	c. ban
(bed) room	Zl.	p.; pct.:(chb.)	p.; (dorm.)
kitchen	Ku	c.	coc.
rent	Mt.	px.	en alq.
furnished	möbl.	meub.	meub.
near	nä.	pr.	jto.; toc.
available	sof.	urg.	—
immediately			
elevator	FS	asc.	asc.; ascens.
garage (in same building)	Gar.	gar.	gje (mismo edif.)
new building	Neub.	—	—
utilities	—	—	serv.
first floor	Erdg.	r.-de-ch.;	—
location		R.-C.	
near Metro	—	M <sup>o</sup> —	—
deposit	Kt.; Kaut.	—	—
upper floor	—	ét. él.	—
location			
rent control	—	—	rta. lida.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Harald Gutschow, "Die Behandlung von Zeitungen, Zeitschriften und Magazinen als Klassenlektüre," Unterrichtspraxis 2, ii(1969): 154-57.

<sup>2</sup>Fe R. Decanay and Donald Bowen, Techniques and Procedures in Second Language Teaching (Quezon City, Philippines: Alemar-Phoenix Publishing House, 1963), pp. 26-33.

<sup>3</sup>Frank M. Grittner, Teaching Foreign Languages (New York: Harper, 1969), p. 278.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Lado, Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

<sup>5</sup>Rebecca M. Valette, Modern Language Testing: A Handbook (New York: Harcourt, 1967).

<sup>6</sup>Louis Dupont, "La Grammaire enseignée par les titres de journaux," Le Français dans le Monde 44(1966): 28-36.

<sup>7</sup>Nelson Brooks, Language and Language Learning: Theory and Practice (New York: Harcourt, 1964).

<sup>8</sup>Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, "La Langue des bandes dessinées et leur contenu culturel," Le Français dans le Monde 98(1973): 14-19.

<sup>9</sup>B. Marsadié and R. Saint-Péron, "Exploitation pédagogique des bandes dessinées de la presse des jeunes français," Le Français dans le Monde 98(1973): 25-32.

<sup>10</sup>From Süddeutsche Zeitung (Munich).

<sup>11</sup>From France Soir (Paris).

<sup>12</sup>From La Vanguardia (Barcelona).

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